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ABSTRACT

In an effort to explain early maternal adaptation, a longitudinal study aimed to delineate the relative importance of maternal expectations for infant behavior, maternal descriptions of infant temperament, and the interaction of these variables, as proposed in the Goodness of Fit model. Infant temperament was considered an environmental variable, while expectations were regarded as expressions of organismic variables. It was hypothesized that a good fit and favorable developmental outcome would result when organismic and environmental variables were in accord. Subjects were 113 mothers between 19 to 44 years of age. Findings indicated that all aspects of maternal adaptation except coping were significantly predicted: low degrees of managability predicted high degrees of irritability, and low managability expectations predicted low 4-month role satisfaction. Predictions could be made over a 6-month period. Infant temperament was more important than maternal expectations. The Goodness of Fit model was not supported. (RH)

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INFANT TEMPERAMENT, MATERNAL EXPECTATIONS AND GOODNESS OF FIT AS PREDICTORS OF MATERNAL ADAPTATION

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INFANT TEMPERAMENT, MATERNAL EXPECTATIONS AND GOODNESS OF FIT AS PREDICTORS OF MATERNAL ADAPTATION

Maternal adaptational experiences have previously been related to descriptions of infant temperament. However, the direction of effects has often not been clearly discernible and the problem of maternal mental variables influencing the temperament descriptions has not been attacked. The present longitudinal study aimed at delineating the relative importance of maternal expectations for infant behavior (mental working models as defined by Zeanah, Keener, & Anders, 1986), maternal descriptions of infant temperament, and the interaction of these variables as proposed in the Goodness of Fit model (Lerner & Lerner, 1983) for an explanation of early maternal adaptation. In the present context, infant temperament would be considered an environmental variable, while the expectations would be regarded as expressions of organismic variables. A good fit and a favorable developmental outcome would result when organismic and environmental variables are in accord. Recently, the value of this model as compared to that of acontextual personality models has been questioned (e.g. Plomin & Daniels, 1984).

Method

Subjects were 113 mothers, aged 19 to 44 years. Maternal adaptation was studied in interviews at infant age 4 months (scales for parental role satisfaction, irritability, stress, and coping) and 10 months (parental role satisfaction). Infant temperament ratings were obtained

in the Baby Behavior Questionnaire (Hagekull & Bohlin, 1981) dimensions of regularity, manageability, and approach-withdrawal at infant age 4 months (2 weeks prior to the beforementioned interview). Realistic expectations for behaviors subsumed in the temperament scales were collected in questionnaires filled out at infant age 6 weeks. Coefficient alphas for the different scales ranged between .50 and .73. Care was taken to minimize confounding of the various measures both by spacing of data collection and in wordings and instructions.

Results and conclusions

Two series of multiple regression analyses were performed with the five adaptation scales as dependent variables. First, each adaptation scale was predicted in three analyses with forced entry of each expectation scale, the corresponding temperament scale, and as a test of the Goodness of Fit model, the interaction of these scales (cf. Plomin & Daniels, 1984). Second, in case of multiple significant predictors, stepwise multiple regressions were performed with all significant contributors to a specific adaptation scale as potential predictors. The main results are summarized in Table 1. All aspects of maternal adaptation except coping were significantly predicted in the expected direction (e.g. low degrees of manageability predicted high degrees of irritability and low manageability expectations predicted low 4-month role satisfaction). Predictions could be made over a 6 month period. Infant temperament was more important than maternal expectations, and the Goodness of Fit model did not receive support as no

interaction term entered as significant predictor. The results could be interpreted within the difficult child tradition of temperament research, and point to the importance of descriptions of actual infant behavior over maternal mental variables for an understanding of early maternal experiences.

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Table 1. Significant predictors of maternal adaptation at infant age 4 and 10 months (n=113).

Dep var	Step	Predictor	R^2_{adj}	F for R^2 change	Semipartial corr
Rolesat4	1	EXP Managea.	.04	5.92*	.22
Irritab4	1	TEMP Managea.	.10	13.82***	-.28
	2	TEMP Regul.	.19	14.85***	-.31
	3	EXP Managea.	.22	4.40*	-.17
Stress4	1	TEMP Managea.	.04	5.77*	-.22
Coping4	-				
Rolesat10	1	TEMP Regul.	.11	15.05***	.36
	2	TEMP Managea.	.19	11.94***	.29

* $p<.05$

*** $p<.001$